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Opening Remarks of Chairman Henry Cuellar
Subcommittee on Emergency Communications, Preparedness, and Response
“Moving Beyond the First Five Years: Ensuring FEMA’s Ability to Respond and
Recover in the Wake of a National Catastrophe”

10:00 A.M. on April 9, 2008
311 Cannon House Office Building

Good morning. First, on behalf of the Members of the Subcommittee, let me welcome our witness. We’re glad that you’re here to share an update with us on the status of FEMA reform. This hearing is entitled: “Moving Beyond the First Five Years: Ensuring FEMA’s Ability to Respond and Recover in the Wake of a National Catastrophe.” As many people know, the Department of Homeland Security just passed the 5-year anniversary since its creation.

Throughout the month of April, each Homeland Security Subcommittee, as well as the full Committee, is taking a look at the Department’s vision for 2009 and beyond. While we want to acknowledge the mistakes made by the Department over those 5 years –and FEMA has made its share— we want to work together to make sure we are learning from those mistakes. In addition, our Committee wants to make sure the Department has developed a vision beyond the end of this Administration. It is vital that the Department – in light of its critical mission – establish sound policies and procedures to ensure that there is continuity in day-to-day operations during the transition period between Administrations. This is especially important for FEMA, whose role has expanded greatly since the Department was created.

On October 4, 2006, President Bush signed into law the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006, which made substantial changes to FEMA and

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the Department of Homeland Security. It created new leadership positions with clear position requirements, new missions and restored some responsibilities that had been removed. Finally, it enhanced the agency's authority to undertake a broad range of activities before and after disasters occur. Efficient, timely, and effective implementation of the Act is critical to homeland security and has been a high priority for myself, Chairman Thompson and the rest of our Committee.

Admiral Johnson, I believe significant progress has been made under Chief Paulison and your leadership to reform the way our Federal government responds to disasters and to make FEMA a more responsive and effective agency. I believe that exceptional work has been done in the areas of disaster operations, logistics and strengthening regional offices to name a few. However, while some progress is being made, enormous challenges still remain. We have been less pleased with progress on emergency housing, public alerts and warnings, contracting and the integration of grants and the agency's various preparedness initiatives. We look forward to hearing updates on your efforts in all of these areas. I want to thank the witnesses again for their testimony. The Chair now recognizes the Ranking Minority Member of the Subcommittee, the Gentleman from Pennsylvania, Mr. Dent, for any statement he may have.